

Remarks

The present amendment responds to the Official Action mailed November 17, 2003.

Claims 1-3, 7, 8, 10-19, and 26-33 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Sekino et al. U.S. Patent No. 6,076,269 ("Sekino"). Claims 20 and 23-25 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Weise et al. U.S. Patent No. 5,105,546 ("Weise"). Claims 4-6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sekino in view of Burge U.S. Patent No. 6,098,298 ("Burge"). Claim 9 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sekino. Claims 21 and 22 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Weise in view of Sekino.

Claims 1, 7, 8, 12, 26, and 29 have been amended to be more clear and distinct. Claims 9 and 33 have been canceled without prejudice. Claims 1-8 and 10-32 are presently pending.

The Art Rejections

The art rejections are traversed as not supported by the relied upon art. The relied upon references do not teach or render obvious the claims as presently amended, as addressed in greater detail below.

Sekino is entitled "Steering Wheel Centering Tool" and describes a steering wheel centering apparatus which includes a leveling device 30 supported on a housing 32. Slide arms 34 and 36 extend outward from the housing 32. Cams 38 and 40 are attached at the ends of the slide arms and are "adapted to contact...an inner surface of the steering wheel rim 14." Col. 3, lines 42-44. As shown in Fig. 2 of Sekino, each cam includes "an outer flange...adapted to contact the front surface 50 of the steering wheel rim 14, and an inner flange...adapted to contact the back surface 54 of the steering wheel rim 14." Col. 3, lines 52-56 (emphasis added).

In contrast to Sekino, the present invention includes two end grips for contacting only the interior portion of the steering wheel and spokes. As seen in Fig. 2, each end grip may suitably include a recess 138 for contacting only the interior portion of the steering wheel. The recess 138 may extend around sides 139 to rest on the interior portion of any horizontal spokes. Sekino clearly teaches a complicated arrangement of cams and flanges which contact the front and back surfaces of the steering wheel. Such a system does not teach or render obvious the claims as presently amended. See amended claim 1, for example which recites that “the grip assembly comprises a first end grip adapted to contact only an interior portion and spoke of one side of a steering wheel, and a second end grip adapted to contact only an interior portion and spoke another side of the steering wheel.” See also independent claims 12 and 26 which have been amended to recite similar limitations. Thus, it is submitted that claims 1-8, 10-19, and 26-32 are in order for allowance.

Independent claim 20, rejected by the Official Action as being anticipated by Weise, addresses a method of aligning wheels of a vehicle including the steps of “following an alignment procedure provided by the alignment machine” and “leveling the steering wheel using the steering wheel level device when instructed to do so by the alignment procedure.” While Weise does disclose techniques for centering a steering wheel, Weise does not teach the step of “leveling the steering wheel using the steering wheel level device when instructed to do so by the alignment procedure,” as claimed. In stark contrast to the present invention, Weise teaches that the steering wheel is allowed to rotate freely. See col. 6, lines 44-49, for example, where Weise recites that “[t]he steering wheel 16 rotates freely with respect to the vehicle chassis throughout the method of the present invention.” Clearly, if the steering wheel of Weise is continuously allowed to rotate freely, this reference cannot teach the claimed step of “leveling the steering



wheel using the steering wheel level device when instructed to do so by the alignment procedure.” Thus, withdrawal of this ground of rejection and the allowance of claims 20-25 is respectfully requested.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, applicant respectfully submits that all of the claims in the present application are in condition for allowance. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections and allowance of claims at the earliest possible date are respectfully requested. Any questions regarding this application may be raised by telephone with the undersigned if it is considered that processing of this application will be expedited thereby.

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Respectfully submitted,

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